

## Book Review

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### BIOETHICS FOR THE PEOPLE BY THE PEOPLE

By Darryl Macer

Eubios Ethics Institute, Christchurch, New Zealand,  
1994, pp. 452.

Working in clinical genetics constantly provides exposure to ethical problems and new challenges to moral thinking provided by scientific progress. Many people have felt that the public has to participate in discussion of these issues. *Bioethics for the People by the People* summarizes and analyzes the results of a survey in which questionnaires were sent to individuals in Australia, Hong Kong, India, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, and Thailand. Introductory essays include perspectives from other parts of Europe and North America as well. Dr. Macer's introduction emphasizes that throughout the world persons have similar opinions with respect to a number of issues, and that the variation is similar to biological variation: the variance within groups may be greater than the variance between groups.

The questionnaires addressed the issues of whether persons were interested in science, and whether or not science contributed to the quality of life. A number of questions addressed the role of technology with respect to the environment and medical applications, including computers, biotechnology, nuclear power, and pesticides. Questions about genetic screening and gene therapy involved prenatal and postnatal screening, attitudes toward mental illness and AIDS, confidentiality of information, and gene therapy. Most persons seem to agree that technology should be used if there are perceivable benefits and if the system of distribution is fair.

The responses to the questionnaire are used to support the contention that there are "universal ethical ideas." The fact that many individuals reach the same conclusion may have a basis in biological evolution that gives rise to similarities in social and spiritual expression. Many people hope that we can achieve a sustainable world with respect to our use of resources: the

need for human beings to be stewards of nature. An idea that is stressed is that conflict itself may be a social phenomenon that is propagated by individuals seeking individual power, using the media or distortions of religious belief to achieve that end. It is also recognized that economics governs what actually happens.

There are contributions by others to the introductory section, including surveys of trends, and some individualistic statements concerning medical issues and health care systems in a number of countries. Since genetics is frequently central to the discussion, there is an essay entitled "Genetic Information in the Health Care Reform Era," by Paul Billings. This includes a striking statement: "In addition, the master political stroke of Dr. James Watson, who was the first HGP (Human Genome Project) director, was to create the ELSI (Ethical, Legal and Social Issues) program. This small component of HGP was designed to assess, and possibly mollify, the impacts of new human genetic information. This novel self-consciousness of a scientific project has been very useful in garnering continued appropriations for what is largely a banal industrial experiment to accurately sequence three billion bases of DNA in an era of shrinking federal budgets for scientific research."

Another seminal contribution is the essay by Jayapaul Azariah entitled "Global Bioethics and Common Hope." His perspective emphasizes the inclusion of other problems besides medical care in bioethics. The discussion centers on three challenges: the preservation of the natural world, the preservation of peace, and the reduction of the effects of poverty. His arguments use techniques of system theory to include spiritual approaches, particularly those of Asian philosophy, in designing appropriate responses to human problems.

**David J. Harris**

Chief, Section of Medical Genetics and  
Molecular Medicine  
The Children's Mercy Hospital  
Kansas City, Missouri